

Savannah

National Wildlife Refuge

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photo: Douglas Baumgartner



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1927.
- The current refuge acreage is 55,942.
- Savannah National Wildlife Refuge is located in Chatham and Effingham counties, Georgia, and Jasper County, South Carolina.
- Location: the refuge field office is located three miles east of Port Wentworth, Georgia off SC Highway 170 then 1/4 mile north on a gravelled road to the field office (the field office/maintenance center is closed to the public).

Natural History

- The refuge lies on the lower Savannah River between mile markers 18 and 40. The port city of Savannah, Georgia lies downstream of the refuge.
- There are over 38 miles of river and over 25 miles of streams and creeks within the refuge boundaries.
- Refuge habitats include bottomland hardwoods, palustrine, estuarine and tidal (eight-foot amplitude) freshwater wetlands. A fringe area of upland hardwoods exists along the eastern boundary, 3,000 acres of which is impounded. An additional 3,000 acres of the impoundment system are managed for migratory wading birds and waterfowl. An additional 87 acres are administrative areas. The Seaboard Coastline Railroad has a 24-acre Right-of-Way agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The refuge is home to a large variety of wildlife including: ducks, geese, wading birds, shorebirds and several endangered and/or threatened species including bald eagles, wood storks, manatees and shortnose sturgeon. The refuge also provides nesting areas for wood ducks, great horned owls,

bald eagles, osprey and swallow tailed kites among others.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Savannah NWR is part of a seven-refuge complex that has an annual budget of \$1,723,000 (FY 05) and a combined staff of 15, eight of which are assigned to this refuge.
- 160,000 visitors annually.

Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System

- To preserve, restore and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practicable) all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened.
- To perpetuate the migratory bird resource.
- To preserve a natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands.
- To provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology, and man's role in his environment, and to provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences.

Refuge Objectives

- To utilize refuge property as "a refuge and breeding ground for native birds and wild animals."
- To provide habitat and protection for those species of plants and animals whose survival is threatened or endangered.
- To provide habitat and sanctuary for migratory birds consistent with the objectives of the Atlantic Flyway.
- To maintain and enhance as needed the habitats of all other species of indigenous wildlife and fishery resources.
- To manage furbearers, deer and other upland game species so their numbers will be compatible with other wildlife management goals.

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- To provide opportunities for environmental education, interpretation and quality-oriented recreation for the visiting public.

Management Tools

- Water level management on 3,000 acres for the benefit of waterfowl, wading birds, wood storks, swallow tailed kites and shorebirds.
- Prescribed fire.
- Mechanical/chemical treatment of undesirable and or noxious plants.
- Deer and feral hog management with public hunting.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.

Public Use Opportunities

Savannah NWR offers an array of public use opportunities:

- Wildlife observation.
- Interpretation.
- Hiking.
- Bicycling.
- Fishing.
- Hunting (deer, turkey, feral hog and squirrel).
- Thirty-six miles of dikes are open seasonally to foot traffic.
- The four-mile Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive is open to vehicular traffic throughout the year.

Calendar of Events

March: all impoundments (pools) open to fishing March 1 to November 30 (designated areas are open all year); feral hog hunting (nine days).

April: turkey hunting (16 days).

May: International Migratory Bird Day programs.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week programs, youth archery deer hunting (31 days); archery deer/hog hunting (31 days).

November: gun hunt for deer, squirrel, and feral hogs; wheelchair-dependent hunters' two day deer hunt.

December: Christmas Bird Count; youth waterfowl hunt (six days).

Questions and Answers

How do I get there?

Take GA Route 25 (East) out of Port Wentworth, GA, cross the Savannah River and you are on the refuge. Proceed three miles east and on the right is the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive.

Are there any costs associated with a visit?

There are no fees charged to visit the refuge.

What can I expect to see?

During the spring and fall, you will usually see many alligators sunning themselves on the banks of waterways, along with an assortment of wading birds. During the winter months waterfowl and other migratory birds are visible in the impoundment system.

Is there a visitor center?

Currently there is no visitor center; however, there is an informational kiosk where a refuge map and interpretive displays of the refuge can be viewed and written information can be obtained.

Are there any hunting and or fishing opportunities?

Yes, fishing is allowed year-round in the creeks and rivers throughout the refuge. Fishing is also allowed within the impoundment system between March 1 and November 30 of each year. Bank fishing from the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive is permitted all year.

Hunting is also permitted on the refuge. The archery hunting season for white-tailed deer and feral hogs extends from October 1 through October 31 each year. The firearm season for deer, feral hogs, and squirrel extends from November 1 through November 30 of each year.

Designated areas are open to wheelchair dependent hunters for a two-day hunt in November. In March, a nine-day feral hog hunt is open to gun hunters. During April there is a 16-day turkey hunt. Waterfowl hunting is permitted in designated areas during state (GA and SC) seasons. A portion of the refuge in Georgia is set aside for a youth archery hunt (October 1-31) and waterfowl hunt (six days in December).